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Depew, Chauncey Mitchell

The finance committee of
the Senate and the people
Washington

1909

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Congress speech
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THE FINANCE COMMITTEE OF THE
SENATE AND THE PEOPLE

SPEECH

OF

HON. CHAUNCEY M. DEPEW
OF NEW YORK

IN THE

SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

JUNE 15, 1909



WASHINGTON
1909

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SPEECH
OF
HON. CHAUNCEY M. DEPEW.

The Senate, as in Committee of the Whole, having under consideration the bill (H. R. 1438) to provide revenue, equalize duties, and encourage the industries of the United States, and for other purposes—

Mr. DEPEW said:

Mr. PRESIDENT: In regard to this matter and the Committee on Finance, the bitter attack just made upon it by the Senator from Nebraska seems to be the culmination of a criticism that has been running against the committee since it presented its tariff report to the Senate. The charge has been made as to the unfair constitution of the committee and the way it has been formed, and that charge has been repeated often to the Senate; and now the charge is made that it is playing petty politics in regard to this matter of the duty on Philippine cigars and in other ways.

As to the Philippine measure, while I do not know the personal views of the President, we all of us have read the declarations which he made both before he became President and since, growing out of his intimate knowledge of Philippine conditions, for the largest possible measure of free trade between the Philippine Islands and the United States. He has frequently declared such a measure most important for the welfare

and uplift of the Philippine people and their loyalty to the United States.

I had no doubt, when this matter was presented by the Finance Committee, that it was substantially in agreement with the views entertained by the President, because they were the views he has so often expressed. Only the proposition of the Committee on Finance was less in what was granted to the Philippines than what the President had repeatedly said he thought would be good policy in the development of those islands and the creation of friendly relations between the Filipino people and the United States.

In regard to this particular proposition, just before the Senator from Wisconsin offered his amendment to reduce the cigars imported free from 150,000,000 to 75,000,000, the president of the Cigar Makers' Union of the United States interviewed me on the subject. He told me the views of the Cigar Makers' Union and the condition of its members as to nonemployment, and said that what they wanted was to reduce the number of cigars imported free to 75,000,000.

I want to say, if the Senator from Wisconsin had not offered the amendment to reduce the number of cigars imported free from the Philippines, I would have done so. The president of the union is a New Yorker, and there are more cigar makers in the State of New York than in any other State in the Union.

In regard to the charge that the committee reduced it from 75,000,000 to 70,000,000 to play politics against the Senator from Wisconsin, it was the demand of the Senator from Connecticut, who had been speaking here for several hours and who represents a great tobacco State, that the number should be reduced from 75,000,000 to

70,000,000. I want to say that I appealed to the committee personally, because of this presentation that had been made to me by the Cigar Makers' Union, to have the number reduced to the lowest possible figure which would satisfy the Executive and the friends of the development of the Philippine Islands. So much on petty politics.

Now, sir, it has been charged that this committee has been unfairly formed, and one of the best posted of the correspondents of the great newspapers in the gallery, who are so keen and clear on all matters, said to me the other day, when I explained to him how the committee had been formed, that with his long experience here he had not thoroughly understood it, because he had not had occasion to look it up. I think it had better go into the RECORD just how the committees of the Senate are formed so that the country may know whether we are dominated by one-man power and by an automatic and self-constituted committee.

How are the committees of the Senate formed? This being a continuing body, we make new committees every two years, when one-third of the membership is changed. Then, sir, the officers of the caucus, elected for the previous two years, cause a notice to be sent to all Senators on the Republican side asking them to meet in the Marble Room for the purpose of organization. When we met there were 59 chairs. There are now 59 Republican Senators. Those chairs have no names upon them. There is no assignment of seats for Senators of prominence or long service. Everything is informal and free. Every Senator can take any seat he pleases, and if it so suits him he can take a front seat, where he can be most conspicuous. There are no rules

restricting any Senator as to what he shall propose or how long he shall speak. We are equals in the caucus.

Then, in the usual and ordinary way a motion is made for the organization of the caucus, by the election of a chairman and secretary, and that is put to a vote by the oldest Senator in term of service, according to a rule which has prevailed in the Senate ever since its organization. When that is done a motion is made that the Chair shall appoint 11 or 13 Senators to constitute a committee on committees. That reaches the ideal that the uplift reformers have been claiming in their venomous attacks on the methods in the House. The attack upon the methods in the House has been that it is wrong for the Speaker to name the committees, and that they should be made by a committee of the House itself.

This committee on committees is appointed by the Chair. When it is complete, another caucus is called by due notice in writing to submit this committee on committees for the action of the Senators. The whole body thus assembled can reject, change, or adopt the report. If the caucus votes to accept the committee as reported, the committee goes to work. It addresses a letter to every Senator, asking him what he wishes in committee assignments; and it does its best, according to my experience, having gone five times through it, to gratify the wishes and ambitions of each Senator.

But when you come to the conditions existing at the beginning of this extra session, they were peculiar. Everybody knew that all the business of this session would come from one committee, that of Finance, and of the 59 Republican Senators, a large majority wished to get on that committee. The rules restrict its member-

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ship to 14, of whom nine are Republicans. To select nine from the great number of applicants was a problem difficult for this committee on committees to solve. They accomplished the task and reported the result of their conclusions to the caucus, and it was a very full caucus. There was the opportunity again for any Senator to charge that the committee was unfairly made up; that the country, in its different parts, was not properly represented. There was one such protest in the caucus, but the Senator making the protest did not criticize the committee except to claim that his own State ought to be represented on it. He did not, however, make a motion or ask for a vote.

Therefore the committee as suggested by the committee on committees received the vote of every Republican Senator who was present in the caucus. But if any Senator was dissatisfied with the committee, he still had another opportunity, because that committee was reported to the full Senate, in order that the Senate might vote whether that committee should stand as the Committee on Finance or whether it should be changed in any particular. On that vote the committee was accepted by the Senate by the unanimous vote of Senators on both sides of the Chamber. So that the committee stands before us having been at least four times unanimously indorsed by the Republicans or the joint votes of both sides.

I understand the same process exactly is pursued by the minority Members of the Senate in the recommendations they make as to who of their number shall go upon committees.

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My colleague and I represent a State which has a great variety of interests. I think the statistics show that New York is the largest manufacturing State in the Union and has more varied productions than any other State; and my colleague and I, representing those interests, both the employees and the employers, have not hesitated to go day by day to the committee in order to present the claims of these industries in New York for their consideration, and in many instances we have succeeded in placing before them views and testimony from people directly interested which have led to a modification in rates which the committee had reported to the Senate upon particular items in this bill. We have found the committee, even when disagreeing with our views, eminently open-minded and courteous.

Now, as to the charge that this committee is discredited in this body, how are we to judge? How are we to know and how is the country to know whether this committee is discredited? Votes talk louder than speeches. We have been told here repeatedly that the people of the United States are hostile to this committee and the bill they have reported and recommended. We have been told here repeatedly that only the Senators who oppose the committee and their work know what is the opinion of the people of the United States. We have been told here repeatedly that every Senator who supports this committee is marching headlong to political destruction, and he does not know it; the only people who know it are the critics of the committee. If that be so, then the Senate is the most extraordinary suicide club which has ever existed. There have been here—taking the wool schedule, which it was said was the real test of popular feeling—practically 51 Repub-

lican Senators supporting the committee and 8 Republican Senators opposing the committee; 8 Senators only with salvation free, and 51 going headlong and heedless to oblivion; 51 not knowing the sentiment of their own States, and 51 ignorant of what the people of the country think and want, and only 8 fully enlightened.

When I look at the electoral college, which selected the President of the United States and you, sir, for the high offices which you adorn—both of you—I discover that the total electoral vote is 483; necessary for a choice, 242. Taking the wool schedule, upon which there was the greatest controversy, the Republican Senators voting to support the committee represented 294 electoral votes, or a majority of 52 of the electoral college, and yet the country has been repeatedly informed by several of the 8 Republican Senators who antagonize the committee that they have a knowledge of the wishes, the opinions, and the desires of the people which is not possessed by the Senators supporting the committee who represent a majority of 52 in the entire vote, Republican and Democratic, of the electoral college. President Taft received 303 electoral votes; so that 294 is within 9 votes of Taft's phenomenal majority. If we take the highest vote cast against the committee by these Republicans on the most important schedules, they represented 55 in the electoral college, while the Republican Senators supporting the committee represent 272.

Now, sir, this committee has had duties to perform greater than any that have fallen upon any other committee during my ten years in the Senate. I was not here during the consideration of the Dingley bill, but it strikes me that the framers of that measure had an

easy task compared with the framers of this bill. The committees of the two Houses which prepared the Dingley bill met when a terrific industrial disaster had overwhelmed the country, and the people believed that it was due to the Democratic tariff measure which was then in force. The demand of the country upon that committee was to protect the industrial interests of the United States. The demand of the country upon the committee was that the action of that committee should be protective—protective everywhere—to give employment to labor and employment for capital. The difficulty that committee had to contend with was not to put rates up or down, but to restrain the eager desire of the whole community for rates so high as to be prohibitive in their practical application. The action of the committee in this easy process was sustained point by point by the concurring opinion of a distressed country.

But now we meet in the midst of great prosperity for the purpose of revising the schedules which have been eleven years in existence. The development of the country during that period has been such in many lines of industry as to require changes. I doubt very much—and I have many sources of information and travel about the country almost as much as anyone—the strength of the demand originally which led the national convention to put the revision plank in the platform, and I believe, sir, that if that plank had not been in the platform Mr. Taft would not have lost a single electoral vote and that his phenomenal popular majority of over a million would have been just as great.

But it was put into the platform, and in obedience to that promise the Committee on Ways and Means

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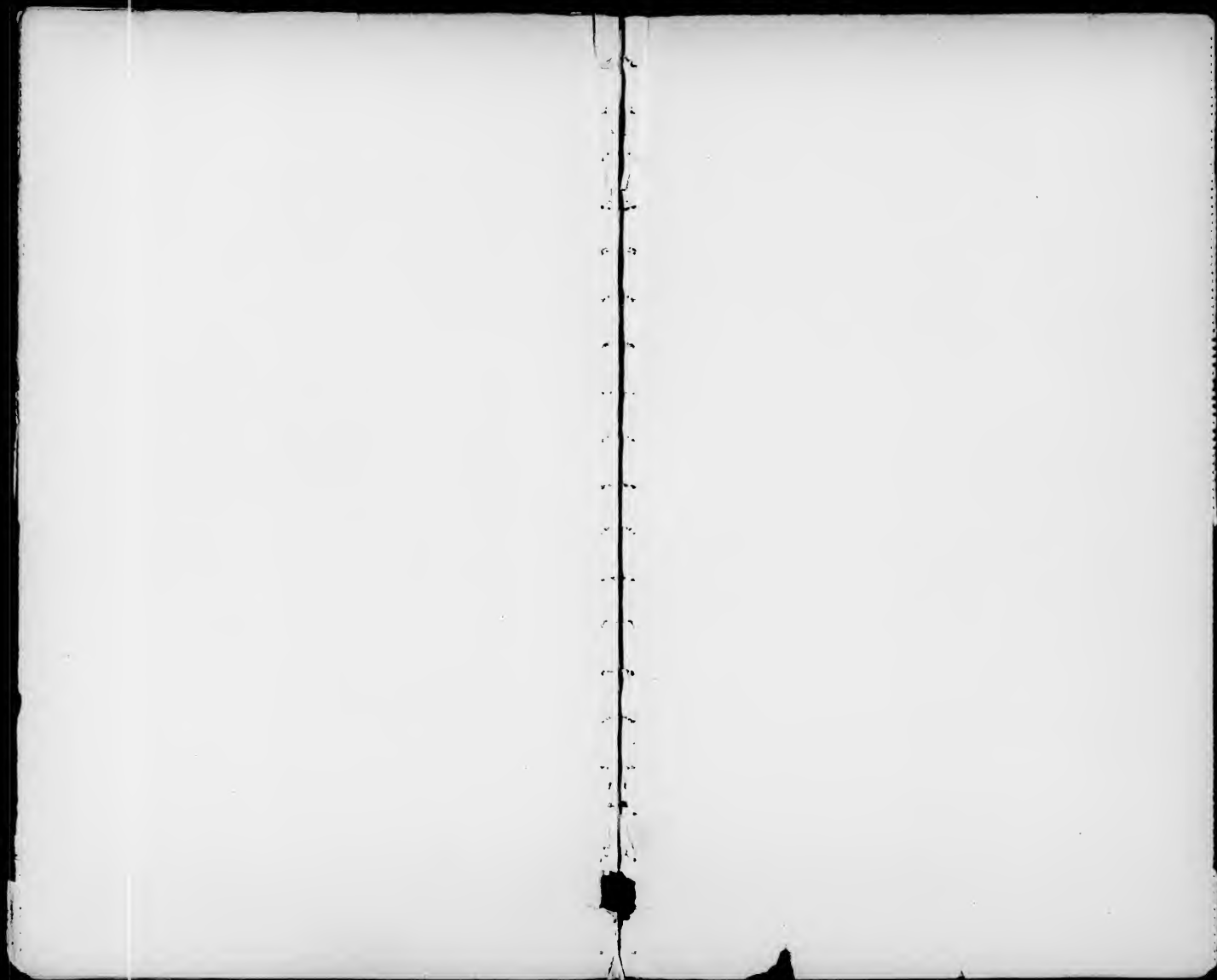
of the House of Representatives met immediately after election, in the early part of November. They continued their work until March, and I think into April, and then the work with all the testimony which had been taken, filling 13 large volumes, with the discussions which had been given to it in the public press, came to the Senate, in a large measure perfected, and then the Finance Committee of the Senate had to undertake on their part to meet the requirements of the country first for revenue and next for protection.

I have been a member of many committees, and the older Senators are familiar with the hard work of committees. They know that there are Members of this body whose names rarely appear in the *Record*, but who have their monuments in the statute books; many Senators who rarely appear in debate, and do not appeal to popular prejudice or popular passion, who are working day and night with an energy, with an industry, and with an intelligence, often impairing their health, giving their best time and mind to what they believe, though knowing they will get no individual credit for it, is for the best interests of the country.

Knowing as I do from intimate study of the action of this committee and of its results, I believe that no committee intrusted with so great a labor and so tremendous a responsibility has ever more faithfully, intelligently, and patriotically performed its work.

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